



Staying Safe on the Water

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

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Millions of Americans will visit U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and our nation's lands and waters this summer. In 2011, 197 people lost their lives while visiting Corps lands and waters, with the majority of these tragedies occurring in and around water.

Drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death for those 1-14 years of age and the third leading cause for those less than 1 and ages 15-24, according to the Center for Disease Control. Wearing a life jacket can reduce drowning deaths. Statistics show that 90 percent of those who drown at U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lakes and rivers may have survived if they had worn a life jacket. Here are some safety tips from the Rock Island District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to help you have a safe and enjoyable summer.

Swimming in open water is more difficult than in a swimming pool. You can tire more quickly and get into trouble. Even the best swimmers can misjudge the water and their skills when boating and swimming. Conditions can change quickly in open water, so before entering the water wear a life jacket. While wearing a life jacket you will not use as much energy, it will help you float and most importantly it will help ensure that you return home alive to those who love you. Peer pressure can cause fatalities, so friends make friends swim in designated areas and wear a life jacket.

People of all ages are strongly encouraged to practice water safety this summer season. Before you head in or around the water consider these five water safety facts:

- **Watch Your Children** - Watch your children at all times when on or around the water. It only takes 20 seconds for a child to drown and before you know it your child could be gone. A lot of people believe that if someone is drowning they will yell for help and that is not always the case. Several people drown each year within 10 feet of safety because the people around them did not recognize that they were drowning. The four signs of a drowning victim include head back, gasping for air, no yelling or sound and arms slapping the water looking like they are trying to climb out of the water. Seconds count and it could make the difference between life and death, so watch those you love.
- **Alcohol and Water Don't Mix** - Many drowning fatalities involve alcohol; even one beer can impair balance, vision, judgment, and reaction time. Research shows that four hours of boating, exposure to noise, vibration, sun, glare, and wind produces fatigue that simulates drunkenness. Boating fatigue combined with alcohol consumption intensifies the effects of both and increases accident risks.
- **Boaters – Know Your Boat!** - Know your boat and know the rules of the road and ask passengers to be an extra set of eyes. Be familiar with governing federal and state laws and have proper safety equipment onboard before boating. Take a boat safety course. As an added incentive, some insurance companies offer discounts to boaters who have successfully completed a boating safety course.

Boaters – Wear Your Life Jacket! “Wear a life jacket; don't just carry one on board. Most of those who drown never had the intention of being in the water,” says John Punkiewicz, outdoor

recreation planner for the Rock Island District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Region II Vice President for the National Water Safety Congress.

Make sure the life jacket is U.S. Coast Guard approved and appropriately sized. Coast Guard law requires children under the age of 13 to wear it, unless otherwise specified by state law. Know your state law!

Boaters – Don't Overload! Don't overload the boat (consider boat size, the number passengers, and extra equipment before loading). Check your boat for all required safety equipment and make sure your passengers know where it is. Carry a set of navigational charts on board and be knowledgeable about the body of water. Check the weather forecast. File a float plan (where you are going & when you plan to return) with family or friends who are not on the vessel.

Boaters – Silent Killer! Boaters should be aware of a silent and invisible killer while boating - carbon monoxide. Early symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include eye irritation, headache, nausea, weakness and dizziness. Know the signs and stay alive. Install and maintain carbon monoxide detectors and avoid areas around boats where exhaust fumes may be present like near the boarding platform.

- **Swimmers: Learn to swim well!** - At U.S. Army Corps of Engineers sites, swimming in non-designated areas is the highest (47 percent) cause for all water-related fatalities nationwide. Don't take chances by over-estimating your swimming skills, and swim only in designated swimming areas. Never swim alone.

Never dive into lakes and rivers. Never rely on toys such as inner tubes and water wings to stay afloat. Reach or throw a floatation device to help someone in trouble and never approach them in the water unless you are a trained life guard!

If you don't know how to swim or can't swim well, wear a life jacket!

Please make your visit to any recreation area a safe and enjoyable one. Taking water safety precautions saves lives — maybe your own. Have a fun and safe summer, learn to swim and remember to WEAR IT!

The Corps' Rock Island District manages recreation sites at its five reservoirs and along the Mississippi and Illinois rivers. In fiscal year 2011, the District's 1,959 campsites, 20 boat ramps, eight public beaches, and five Visitor Centers experienced nearly 15 million visits.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is the nation's largest federal provider of outdoor and water-based recreation, managing more than 400 lake and river projects in 43 states and hosting more than 370 million visits per year. With 90 percent of these recreation areas within 50 miles of metropolitan areas they provide a diverse range of outdoor activities close to home and to people of all ages. For more information on Corps recreation sites and activities, visit www.CorpsLakes.us.

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